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# Youth and Sustainable Fashion



By **Gemma Alexander**

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“Fashion is one of the most highly polluting industries on earth. Unlike the construction or tourism or tech industries that are also highly polluting, fashion is damaging to every sector of the environment, whether terrestrial or aquatic,” says Shelley Rogers, Fashion for the Earth coordinator at EarthDay.org. Fast fashion, with its focus on short-term trends and low prices, is the biggest culprit. But those same qualities make fast fashion especially appealing to young people. That’s why this year, EarthDay.org is focused on increasing youth involvement in sustainable fashion – and you can help, no matter how old you are.

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## Youth and Fashion

Young people, that is, millennials (born between roughly 1981 and 1996) and Gen Z (born 1995–2012) are generally [more aware of climate](#) issues than other generations and are more likely to be activists for the environment. But they are also the [target demographic](#) for most fast fashion brands.

“The problem with GenZ, considered the most environmentally conscious group, is that there is an ‘intention behavior gap’ where the intention is to practice sustainability, but the numbers show they are shopping from fast fashion companies a lot. The problem is price, availability, and being unsure of what is and what isn’t sustainable,” says Rogers.



Despite being considered the most environmentally conscious group, Gen Zers shop from fast fashion companies a lot.

However, some young people are closing the behavior gap. Young designers like [Maya Penn](#) are building slow fashion brands, while [sustainable fashion influencers](#) on Instagram are showing that sustainable can be stylish.

“Many young people are actually doing something about the problem. They are thrifting, reselling, and renting, disrupting fast fashion. Some expect these alternative markets to become extremely competitive, if not on par with fast fashion by 2030,” says Rogers. EarthDay.org’s [Fashion for the Earth](#) program is working to facilitate that shift.

### Fashion for the Earth

For two years in a row, the fashion industry [has been a focus](#) for EarthDay.org’s [Invest in the Earth](#) campaign.

“It is all directed at one thing – to find a way to avoid fast fashion, to shop less and to shop sustainably,” says Rogers.

In time for Earth Day this year, Fashion for the Earth is launching a TikTok series of interviews with college students to share their thoughts on sustainable fashion and encourage others to think about their choices. Another new project for Earth Day 2023 is [Swap for the Earth](#), an online toolkit for organizing campus clothing swaps in the week leading up to Earth Day. These events encourage reuse and reinforce awareness of the overconsumption of clothing. Videos from the events will be shared online.



The My Planet, My Closet program is a continuation of <sup>CLOSE</sup> last year. It asks people to send in videos showing off their sustainable clothing items as an inspirational “what’s in your closet” project that will be shared on social media. EarthDay.org also produced digital toolkits explaining [how to shop](#) for more sustainable clothes and [how to care for](#) clothing so it lasts longer. A series of webinars and blog posts examine sustainable fashion topics in more detail.

Look for this content on your preferred platform with the hashtags #EarthDay and #InvestInOurPlanet.

**MY PLANET MY CLOSET**  
LOVERS OF THE PLANET & LOVERS OF FASHION UNITE!

**Become an 'Influencer' - Not a 'Follower'**  
We want to showcase your efforts to halt the unsustainable consumption of clothing that is destroying the earth's water, air, soil, and species!

**JOIN EARTHDAY.ORG'S CAMPAIGN**  
**FASHION FOR THE EARTH & our latest project:**  
**MY PLANET MY CLOSET**

**Show off your sustainable closet in a 1-2 minute video**

- Show us your sustainable fashion haul: Model or display your clothes - this can be many items, a few items, or even just one
- Tell us about the items: Are they made of a sustainable fabric? Where did you get them? Are they second hand from a swap, a shop, a rental, a resale or a hand-me-down?
- Tell us about yourself: Describe how you feel about fashion and the planet or what you're doing to make a difference in how you shop for clothes.
- *Mention that your video is for EARTHDAY.ORG and My Planet My Closet.*
- Follow our few simple instructions to the right. Then send us your video!

*\*organic cotton, hemp, jute, lyocell, flax, recycled polyester, fabrics made from agricultural products, etc.*

**Instructions for video format and how to submit it:**

- Videos should be shot in a landscape/horizontal format and shooting with a mobile phone is fine.
- Narrators should be on-camera or (if necessary) recorded in a voice-over.
- Narrators should model or display clothing so they are clearly visible.
- Save your 1-2 minute video as an MP4 and send via Dropbox or WeTransfer to [arts@earthday.org](mailto:arts@earthday.org).
- At the start, please state your name and location.
- Please send videos by no later than mid-March for possible inclusion in Earth Day 2022.
- By sending your video, you agree that EARTHDAY.ORG has permission to share it on our website, social media, and on Earth Day 2022. For questions, contact [arts@earthday.org](mailto:arts@earthday.org).

Image: [EarthDay.org](https://www.earthday.org)

## What Youth Can Do

All of these resources are designed to help young people overcome the barriers to dressing more sustainably.

“It’s something that we all do every day – getting dressed – and something that’s within our control. That’s the important thing. Buying sustainable clothes, wearing them longer, taking care of them and keeping them for years instead of



months makes an enormous difference,” says Roger!<sup>CLOSE</sup>

Restrictions on time and money often drive people of all ages to make less sustainable choices despite their best intentions. But even just learning about sustainable options now is a step in the right direction.

“As GenZ moves into the working world and they begin to earn an income, hopefully they will spend the extra money it takes to purchase better quality clothing. Sooner or later educated people will demand government put an end to an industry that is harmful to all living things and continuing to grow out of control,” says Rogers.

Even without much time or money, young people can start to [make those demands](#) now – and so can parents. Anyone can encourage their representatives to support legislation like the [E.U. Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles](#) and the [Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act](#) in New York State’s legislature.



Many young people are finding ways to avoid fast fashion by shopping secondhand and reselling clothes they no longer wear.

## What Parents Can Do

Parents can help their kids understand the environmental impact of fast fashion and the steps to building a [more sustainable wardrobe](#).

“Parents should also question the way fast fashion hooks children with what’s called ‘FOMO’ or fear of missing out. Social media pressure is a very hard thing to overcome for young people,” says Rogers. Understanding that they are being manipulated can change a young person’s perspective significantly.

The fashion industry also depends on [child labor](#). Young people like themselves are working in sweatshops in the global south where they make less than a living wage to keep the prices of clothing low enough for our teenagers to overconsume.

“Once you understand the depth of the problem, it’s hard to want to be part of it. Having fewer, but better made clothes that are well taken care of is the answer,” says Rogers.